



## Some Vital Statistics of Jagannath Temple Complex

*Pramod Chandra Pattanayak*

Jagannath temple of Puri attracts devotees from every nook and corner of the country and abroad. This is one of the 4 “Dhamas”, the others being Rameswaram in the South, Dwaraka in the West and Badrinath in the North. It is believed in Hindu Philosophy that one has to step in to these 4 Dhamas during a life time in order to get Mokshya (Salvation) from the cycle of birth and rebirth. Besides this philosophical thought the Trinity are special attraction for devotees and the temple with its medieval art and architecture adds additional attraction for visitors. As such Puri is a hub of the country throughout the year, besides the special functions and festivals like Car Festival, Snana Purnima and Nabakalebara etc, which are witnessed by millions. The temple of Lord Jagannath is not one but a group of temples, big and small with many other important structures annexed to it. It is but natural that inquisitive visitors and devotees coming to the complex become interested to know different aspects such as historical facts, legendary fictions, vital statistics so on and so forth relating to the temple deities, and other structures inside the temple complex. I present herewith some of them for those inquisitive devotees and visitors who often do not get chance to have them, may be due to the problem of language for communication or otherwise. The subject being vast, I only present a pinch of it

which may act as a drop of water to quench the thirsty readers' curiosity.

The entire complex has covered an area of 10 acres and has been surrounded by two solid stone walls leaving a space in between them. The outermost is called ‘Meghanad Pacheri’ which has a length of 650ft from east to west and breadth of 644ft from north to south direction. The height of Meghanad Pacheri is 20ft and thickness of 6ft. The inner wall is known as ‘Kuruma Pacheri’. The length of this Kuruma Pacheri is 400 ft from East to West and 278 ft from North to South direction. The height of Kuruma Pacheri is almost equal to the height of Meghanad Pacheri but the thickness of the Pacheri is less than the thickness of Meghanad Pacheri i.e only 5ft. There are 4 gates on Meghanad Pacheri from 4 directions for the entry into the complex. But the main gate for entry into the complex is from the eastern side which is known as the ‘Singhadwar’, so termed as there are 2 stone statues of lions (Singha), placed on both sides of the gate. These two lions represent Jaya and Vijaya, the known legendary figure. The western gate is known as ‘Byaghra Dwara’ due to the placement of 2 statues of Tigers (Byaghra), Northern gate is known as ‘Hastidwara’ due to placement of 2 statues of elephants (Hasti) and Southern gate is known as ‘Aswa Dwara’ due to the placement of 2 statues of Horses



(Aswa). These 4 gates signify Dharma, Artha, Kama and Mokhya as pronounced by great saints in the past.

While entering in to the main gate i.e. Singadwara one would come across a pillar known as 'Arunastambha' in front of the gate. The height of the stone pillar is 33 ft and the quality of the stone is black granite. This pillar is unique in the sense that, it has 16 sides. It is said that during Marahatta regime in the state, the then, Gajapati Dibyasingha Dev brought this pillar from Konark and installed it in front of the main gate. Arunastambha has been installed on a strong foundation to withstand the adverse climatic hazards like storms and tempests. The basement of the pillar depicts an architectural fits of the artisans of the yester years on 4 sides and it has been cordoned around by grill fence for the protection.

Going to the temple complex after passing the Singhadwar one enters into the first part of the complex, known as Gumuti. It is a miniature temple itself placed almost midpoint of eastern Meghanad Pacheri. The Gumuti has a number of deities inside, out of which Patitapaban is significant and needs a special mention as there is a legend behind it. This stone statue of Patitapaban was constructed during 1727-1736 AD, in the reigning period of Ramachandra Dev-II. Ramachandra Dev II made his palace inside Barabati Fort in Cuttack. Circumstantially he married a Muslim girl named Rizia, daughter of Nabab Munna Khan of Murshidabad. Thus he was self banished from the religion and lost the right for entry in to the temple. But he was a sincere and dedicated devotee of Sri Jagannath and as such he lost his peace of mind without Darshan of his God. Once Jagannath appeared in the dream of the king and asked him to establish a replica of the main deity and place him suitably in

the Gumuti so that the devotees deprived of entering into the complex may see him from the proximity. Accordingly the statue was installed and was named as Patitapaban meaning the "redeemer of the fallen" ones.

Crossing the Gumuti one has to climb up 22 steps before reaching the main temple. These are known as "Baisipahacha". The length of each step is 70ft with a width of 6 feet and height of 8 inches each. These 22 steps are considered as very sacred in Hindu philosophy and they represent the total number of feet of ten Avatars of the past millenniums. Some others opine that before going near "Ratnabedi" for a Darshan of Lord Jagannath one has to cross Astabaikuntha viz Sri Baikuntha, Swetadwipa Baikuntha, Seshasai Baikuntha, Parabyoma Baikuntha, Garvodaksal Baikuntha and Kailash Baikuntha. After the above 8 steps, there are 14 Bhuvanas. Out of these Bhuvanas 7 are connected with Earth and 7 with 'Patal'. The former are 'Bhu', 'Bhurba', 'swah', 'Mahah', 'Jana', 'Tapah', and 'Satya' whereas the later are 'Atal', 'Sutala', 'Bitala', 'Talatala', 'Mahitala', 'Rasatala' and Patal.

Yet another hypothesis coexists which describes that one has to leave behind, control and sacrifice 22 'Prakruti' before getting a scared Darshan of Lord Jagannath. These are ten senses (5 'Kamendriya' and 5 'Gyanendriya') 5 Panchamana namely Mana, Aman, Biman, Kuman and Sumana. 7 Vikaras i.e. Kama(lust), Krodha(anger), Moha(emotion), Lova(greed), Ahankar(selfpride), Irsha (jealousy) and Ghruna(hatred). Thus the 22 steps carry much significance in Hindu philosophy.

The most interesting part of this episode is that presently, there are only 17 steps instead of 22. This was verified by counting and recounting at the spot. This was discussed with many



personalities connected with the temple service. But no concrete and conclusive answer could be available on the discrepancy. But one logistic answer could be derived out of this query that it is a long period between the initial construction and the present state of the temple, during which the temple complex has undergone a number of destructions and innovations through which 5 steps have been buried underneath.

The height of the main temple is 214 ft and 8 inches. On the top of the temple a metal (admixture of 8 metals) wheel with a staff of 15ft has been fixed. This wheel has 8 spokes and is known as 'Nilachakra'. It is said that the original wheel and the staff has been replaced twice in the meanwhile. First change was taken up by the king Ramachandra Dev of Bhoi dynasty. Later on it was replaced by Damodar Champatiray, son of Parikha Badajena Mohapatra and this has a reference in Madalapanji. The name Nilachakra is a mystical term as it never looks blue (Nila). This wheel symbolizes the Chakra of Lord Srikrishna and there is an interesting story on this score which may delight the reader.

Once the Chakra of the Lord indulged in self pride that he has played the decisive roles in Mahabharat War and other events by beheading great heroes, while his master only passed the orders with his usual smiling lips. Lord Jagannath, being incarnation of Visnu (Srikrishna) the Almighty had that extraordinary ability to perceive others' feelings. The Lord can tolerate any mischief but not the self pride. On perception of the feelings of his loving weapon, Lord wanted a reform in him then and there. So He asked Chakra to go to Hanuman and tell him to come at once. Chakra was shocked as he was engaged in such a petty job which he thought to be below his dignity. But being an obedient attendant, in a twinkling of an eye flew to Hanuman and passed on

the order of his master. Hanuman is again a symbol of super Divine having the power of perception of everything. So he casually treated Chakra and sent him back by telling "I am coming, you go". This was the second jolt for Chakra, as Hanuman treated him as an ordinary messenger, instead of an ambassador of the great Lord and did not carry the order of his master at once. Indulgence in self pride often eclipses the wisdom and prudence and that happened in case of Chakra. Thus he forgot that Hanuman possessed the power of flying in lightning speed. Chakra got the third jolt when coming back to the temple found Hanuman coming out of the temple after meeting with his master. Now the Chakra came to senses and prostrated before his master admitting his folly. The Lord not only excused but blessed him and awarded with highest position in the temple complex. The master wanted that his devotees should first get a glimpse of his faithful weapon from a distance and then only blessed one would be able to get His darshan. In fact the wheel with its flag is visible from a distance of about 10 kms from the temple. I have personally heard from people that this wheel is visible from a top hillock of Barunei situated near Khurda town, of course in clear weather. This means the distance is about 20 kms from the temple as the crow flies.

Lord Jagannath is the greatest legendary God and therefore enumerable legends are there on deities, temples and other sacred structures of the complex. As already stated only a few digital information with some legends are presented here taking into account the scope of this article.

---

Pramod Chandra Pattanayak lives at Plot No.678, Laxmisagar, Bhubaneswar - 751006